

Bezos putting up \$10B to fight climate change; Initiative to fund scientists, activists and nongovernmental groups

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Body

Jeff Bezos, Amazon's chief executive and the world's richest man, said on Monday that he was committing \$10 billion (U.S.) to address the climate crisis in a new initiative he called the Bezos Earth Fund.

The effort will fund scientists, activists and nongovernmental organizations, he said in a post on Instagram. Bezos, who has been pushed by Amazon employees on climate issues, said he expected to start issuing grants this summer.

"Climate change is the biggest threat to our planet," he wrote. "I want to work alongside others both to amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet we all share."

Bezos has in the past done little philanthropy. With a net worth of \$130 billion, he long preferred to focus on Amazon and other private ventures, such as Blue Origin, which makes rockets. Bezos also owns the Washington Post.

More recently, Bezos has ramped up his giving. His largest donation to date was \$2 billion, unveiled in September 2018, to help homeless families and build a network of Montessori preschools, an effort that he announced with his then-wife, MacKenzie.

After the couple divorced last year, MacKenzie Bezos said she had signed the Giving Pledge, which asks the world's richest people to commit to giving away at least half their wealth during their lifetime or in their wills. Jeff Bezos has not signed the pledge.

In September, Jeff Bezos unveiled the Climate Pledge, in which he said Amazon would meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement 10 years ahead of schedule and would be carbon-neutral by 2040. As part of the pledge, he said Amazon was ordering 100,000 electric delivery trucks from Rivian, a Michigan-based company that Amazon has invested in.

At the time, Bezos said Earth's climate was changing faster than predicted by the scientific community five years ago. "Those predictions were bad but what is actually happening is dire," he said.

Bezos made that pledge after Amazon's employees agitated on climate change. For a year, workers pressed Amazon to be more aggressive in its climate goals, staging walkouts and talking publicly about how the company could do better.

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With vast data centres that power cloud computing and a global network for shipping and delivering packages, Amazon's own effect on the environment is substantial. In September, the company revealed its own carbon footprint for the first time, disclosing it emitted about 44.4 million metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2018 - the equivalent of burning almost 600,000 tanker trucks' worth of gasoline.

"That would put them in the Top 150 or 200 emitters in the world," alongside oil and gas producers and industrial manufacturers, Bruno Sarda, president of CDP North America, a nonprofit organization that encourages carbon disclosures, said in an interview at the time.

Amazon employees cheered the company's Climate Pledge, but continued to push executives to stop providing cloud computing services to the oil and gas industry.

Amazon has resisted the pressure, saying in a policy statement that "the energy industry should have access to the same technologies as other industries."

The workers, through their group Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, said on Monday that although they applauded Bezos' philanthropy, "one hand cannot give what the other is taking away."

They added, "The people of Earth need to know: When is Amazon going to stop helping oil and gas companies ravage Earth with still more oil and gas wells? When is Amazon going to stop funding climate-denying think tanks like the Competitive Enterprise Institute and climate-delaying policy?"

Margaret O'Mara, a professor at the University of Washington who studies the history of tech companies, called the new Bezos fund "a very powerful statement."

The new fund is not connected to Amazon. The donation is one of the largest known commitments made by an individual, according to a database run by the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

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